DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 057 384 CG 006 761

AUTHOR	Meacham, Merle L.
TITLE	The School Psychologist: Classroom Consultant in Behavioral Techniques.
INSTITUTION	Washington Univ., Seattle.
PUB DATE	3 Sep 71
NOTE	8p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., September 3-7, 1971
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Behavior; *Behavior Change; *Change Agents; Class Management; Classroom Techniques; *Consultants; *School Psychologists; *Teacher Behavior; Teachers

ABSTRACT

The role of the school psychologist is conceptualized as demanding general expertise in classroom management, curriculum, and factors affecting the learning of children. The psychologist's client is the classroom teacher, but his success depends on whether or not his consulting efforts with teachers make a difference with children. The author suggests that 2 major problems confront the school psychologist: (1) helping to bring about changes in classroom variables so that children's behaviors change; and (2) maintaining these changes. Throughout her discussion, the author emphasizes that the real "name of the game" is changing teacher behavior. By way of example, 2 consulting situations are elaborated. Ways of involving teachers, facilitating their change, and maintaining it are suggested. The author concludes that the school psychologist's future lies in developing his consultant skills and his ability to effect teacher, as well as child, behavior change. (TL)

ED057384

THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST: CLASSROOM CONSULTANT IN BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES

Presented at Annual Meeting of American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., September 3, 1971

Merle L. Meacham University of Washington

For the twenty years that I have been a school psychologist I have rarely attended a professional meeting that did not include some formal discussion of the role of the school psychologist and I have never attended one that did not include informal discussion. Our literature contains much devoted to "role and function" as any casual perusal will substantiate. (Magary, 1967; Meacham, 1968; Morice, 1968; Silverman, 1969; Roberts, 1970; Barclay, 1971.) I have sometimes wondered if all this writing and discussion represents the anxiety we feel in the face of an identity crisis or is just a measure of our professional concern. Probably it's a bit of both. Actually I feel that it has been good, for it has eliminated complacency (at least in most of us) and has allowed us to be flexible enough to develop with the changing needs of the schools and the changing knowledge in psychology.

Recently Jim Barclay (1971) has made a strong case for the proper domain of our efforts to be "classroom learning". He feels, and I agree, that the real action lies in the classroom as a consultant to teachers. Also he supports a strong emphasis on behavioral techniques so that the psychologist is accountable for his behavior in terms of outcomes for children. I quote: "Psychologists in the school should not be judged by how many tests they give and reports they write.....but rather on what their success ratio is in reducing maladaptive behavior in the classroom, accelerating skill development, and helping teachers become more effective." (Barclay, 1971 p. 280)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

CG 006 761

In this role we must have broad general expertise in classroom management, curriculum, and factors affecting the learning of children. I don't mean to imply we should be all things to all people but that we should concentrate on providing services to teachers that accelerate and maintain desirable academic and non-academic behaviors of children and decelerate and eliminate the undesirable ones. This is a complex task involving much more than the management of a few contingencies! However, it is a fascinating and challenging one.

Today, I do not wish to spend time developing a complex role for school psychologists. I would refer you to Jim's article in the March, 1971 American Psychologist if you are interested. What I would like to do is look more closely at one implication of this role and discuss two small studies related to it.

It seem to me a very important assumption that the teacher is our client not the student, (although the criterion of success is change in student's behavior). Therefore, much of our effort is involved in changing teacher behavior. The teacher is the manager of the significant classroom variables and generally it is through his/her efforts at changing these variables that we are successful or unsuccessful in helping children. If this is true, then we need to look at the means to effect teacher change so that we are more efficient in our role as consultants. (May I say parenthetically that I am not implying that we are the only ones with answers that we impose on teachers. Far from it! I have learned far more these last twenty years working with effective teachers than I have from textbooks.) However, when we are asked to consult in a classroom I believe we assume the responsibility that some action follow that consultation; and, if it is effective, it is maintained, whether that action be a teacher inspired idea or one of our own.

Thus, we have two major problems: (1) helping to bring about changes in classroom variables that make significant and desirable differences for children and (2) once these changes have been made seeing that they are maintained. Some would disagree with the latter but I feel that a consultant has some obligation for the maintenance of change as well as initiating it.

During the past two years I have been a consultant in two rather interesting situations. The first involved being a consultant to consultants (I hope this is not the beginning of an infinite regress!) and the second more closely allied to the role of the school psychologist as a consultant to teachers. In the former situation I worked with a fine group of educators on Project Early Warning for the Highline puplic schools near Seattle. (The acronym for that project still bother me!) Project Early Warning was designed to help youngsters with learning and behavioral difficulties in the early elementary school grades. The staff consisted of school psychologists, elementary counselors, experts in reading and a master teacher who frequently functioned as a demonstration teacher. I came around occasionally to give some advice on data taking and behavioral management and ended up learning a great deal.

Very early in the project we learned that the real name of the game was "changing teacher behavior" and the group set out to deliberately maximize the probability of this occuring. For example, when a teacher referred a child for some problem she also understood that she was referring herself and her entire class. This involved moving with her class to the Project's building for a week of observation and training. After baseline data were taken through observation glass various techniques were used to help her. She would be given a small FM radio and walked through certain procedures in her class as the occasion demanded. Video

tapes would be taken and discussed. The master teacher would take the class and demonstrate certain techniques while the regular teacher observed. Special curriculum materials would be suggested or developed. After this rather intensive week the staff provided follow-up consultation to the teacher back in the regular classroom. At all times the staff used "good" behavioral consultation techniques by maximizing praise and success and minimizing criticism.

Results were quite variable. Some teachers continued to use the ideas developed during this week and follow-up consultations. Others did not even though it had been demonstrated that they "worked". Some data taken in the classroom after the week of training showed almost immediate return to the previous or baseline conditions. The staff had to conclude that success was not necessarily reinforcing but that was about the only contingency they had except for occasional social reinforcers which evidently were also not reinforcing for some teachers.

During the second year of the project all of the consultation was done in the regular classrooms because there was some complaint about having to move to the new building for a week. The results were pretty much the same. It was one thing to effect a change it was another to maintain it.

Several months ago Gary Morton, the director of the project and this Winter a doctoral student at the University of Oregon, decided to do some systematic investigation of this phenomenon. He began on a small scale with one student teacher and is currently writing up his data for publication. Gary has given me permission to share this with you but I will not go into great detail just some of the general results. With the aid of a master teacher who had a strong behavioral orientation he

decided to study the behavior of a student teacher who was receiving some training in behavioral management. The master teacher was doing the instruction. Her goal was to decrease the rate at which the student teacher attended to disruptive behaviors. She modeled this for her and explained the reasons. Using a multiple baseline technique Gary found that when the master teacher was present the attending behavior was much lower than when the master teacher was absent. The latter data, by the way, was taken by two fourth-graders. They had no chance to compare results and the reliability of their observations was .94. Maybe, we are missing a bet if we don't use youngsters as data takers more often!

After baseline, the master teacher provided supervision of the student teacher on a fixed schedule. As one might expect, this resulted in a further diminution of the attending behavior while the supervisor was absent. There was no generalization. Finally the supervisory schedule was changed to a variable one. This did not further affect the attending behavior when the master teacher was present (it was already quite low) but it did have a significant effect when she was absent. There was a marked decrease of attending to disruptive behavior at those times also. I am certainly not going to generalize to our consultant practices from this interesting little study but I am intrigued by the idea that we might be more effective in maintaining changes in teacher behavior on an intermittent consultation schedule than a fixed one. Gary is currently planning a much broader study of this phenomenon and should have some interesting data in about a year.

My second consultation involved spending a few hours weekly as a resource person in behavior modification to some teachers in a middle school in Seattle's Central Area. This was part of a dropout study and our

efforts were designed to see if we could significantly lower the rate of absenteeism through behavioral management techniques with special emphasis on contingency management. We were successful in this when compared to the control group largely due to a contingency contracting system developed with the high absentee students. However, there was another part of the Project which is more pertinent to our interests today and that was a systematic attempt to change teacher behavior from "inappropriate" to "appropriate". The teachers in this project had been involved in a course in behavior modification taught by one of my colleagues and myself so that they were familiar with the general ideas. Part of the course involved a task with a specific child including data taking and a planned intervention. With their agreement, albiet reluctant in some instances, we decided to try to help them change how they responded to children in their classrooms. We wished to increase the rate of appropriate responses, which involved attending to desirable student behaviors and ignoring undesirable ones; and decrease the rate of inappropriate responses which involved just the opposite. "Desirable" and "undesirable" were specifically defined for each classroom. To do this we took data randomly in each class for twenty minute segments each week. Baseline consisted of a two-hour sample of student-teacher interaction with observations and recordings every ten seconds. Our approach was simply to share the data with the teacher and discuss it if she wished. At the end of the year the eight teachers had shown a significant drop, about 33% in inappropriate behavior and a 107% increase in appropriate behavior. This despite the fact that some of the teachers were "reluctant" behavior modifiers. What seemed to work here was getting the teachers involved in setting some behavioral goals and then sharing their data with them. The staff, of course, tried to use themselves as social

reinforcers but we all have some question as to how reinforcing we were. It is also possible that our random schedule of observations made some difference in the outcome.

The State of Washington is currently involved in changing its certification standards for counselors and school psychologists. We are moving away from criteria based on coursework and college credits to performance criteria with the ultimate goal of determining those behaviors which make a difference for children. (Brammer and Springer, 1971) Assuming that our role as classroom consultants will continue and, indeed, expand it seems to me important that we determine those consultant behaviors which are most effective. I agree with Jim Barclay that our professional future hangs on demonstrating that we make a difference for children. Crucial to this is changing teacher behavior. Do, for example, the skills taught in our counselor training programs make the school psychologist a more effective change agent? We think so at the University of Washington but we have no evidence for this. In fact, I tend at this time to look on my consultant role as if I were a behavioral counselor. With the client-teacher I work out the desired terminal behaviors and the steps to achieve these behaviors; then I help in this process as best I can letting the data tell me whether I am successful or not. Thus far, my experience has taught me that we need to be experts in "teacher learning" as well as child learning and I suspect that the most effective school psychologists have always had these skills. Our future, I believe, lies in developing our consultant skills, our ability to change teacher behavior as well as our ability to suggest effective changes in classroom variables.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barclay, James. "Descriptive, Theoretical, and Behavioral Characteristics of Subdoctoral School Psychologists," American Psychologist, 26 #3, March 1971, 257-280.

Brammer, L. M. and Springer, E. C. "A Radical Change in Counselor Education and Certification," Personnel and Guidance Journal, 49 #10, June 1971, 803-808.

Magary, James F. (Ed.). School Psychological Services in Theory and Practice, Prentice-Hall, 1967.

Meacham, Merle L. "Reinforcement Theory as a Basis for Clinical School Psychology," Psychology in the Schools 5, 1968, 114-117

Morice, Herbert O. "The School Psychologist as a Behavioral Consultant: A Project in Behavior Modification inaa Public School Setting," Psychology in the Schools, 5, 1968, 253-261.

Roberts, Robert D. "Perceptions of Actual and Desired Role Functions of School Psychologists and Teachers," Psychology in the Schools, 7, 1970, 175-178.

Silverman, Hirsch I. "School Psychology: Divergent Role Conceptualizations," Psychology in the Schools, 6, 1969, 266-271.